

WHAT IS CLAIMED IS:

- Sub 1
1. A computer implemented method of initiating a transfer of funds from one online account to another in a computer network, comprising:
 - receiving from a first user a request to establish an online account;
 - receiving account access information for a bank account from the first user, wherein once the bank account is verified the first user is able to transfer funds between the online account and the bank account;
 - verifying, using the account information, whether the first user has access to the bank account; and if verified
 - receiving a transfer request from the first user, the transfer request including an amount of funds for transfer from the online account associated with the first user and identification information for a recipient of the funds, the identification information including an electronic message address for the recipient; and
 - automatically sending an electronic message to the recipient using the electronic message address, the electronic message indicating that funds are ready for transfer to the recipient.
 2. The computer implemented method of claim 1, further comprising the steps of:
 - receiving a response from the recipient accepting or rejecting the transfer of funds; and
 - transferring said amount of funds from the online account associated with the first user to a second online account associated with the recipient if the response indicates acceptance.
 3. The computer implemented method of claim 1, wherein the bank account is one of a checking account and a savings account.
 4. The computer implemented method of claim 1, wherein the step of verifying comprises the steps of:

causing a small deposit to be made to the bank account using the account access information;

notifying the first user that a deposit has been made to the bank account;
requesting from the first user identification of the amount of the deposit;
receiving a response from the first user identifying the amount of the deposit; and

verifying whether the amount identified in the response matches the amount deposited in the bank account, whereby the bank account is verified if a match occurs.

5. The computer implemented method of claim 4, wherein the small deposit has a value of between 0.01 dollars and 1.00 dollar, inclusive.

6. The computer implemented method of claim 2, wherein the account access information and the response are received from the user over the Internet.

7. The computer implemented method of claim 1, further including the step of transferring funds from the banking account to the online account associated with the first user in response to a request to transfer funds if the bank account is verified.

8. The computer implemented method of claim 1, further including the step of transferring funds from the online account associated with the first user to the bank account in response to a request to transfer funds if the banking account is verified.

9. The computer implemented method of claim 1, wherein the step of verifying comprises the steps of:

causing two or more small deposits to the banking account using the account access information;

notifying the user that the two or more deposits have been made to the banking account;

requesting from the user identification of the amounts of each of the two or more deposits;

receiving a response from the user identifying the amounts of each of the two or more deposits;

verifying whether the amounts identified in the response match the amounts deposited in the banking account, whereby the account is verified if a match occurs.

10. The computer implemented method of claim 9, wherein each of the small deposits has a value of between 0.01 dollars and 1.00 dollar, inclusive.

11. The computer implemented method of claim 1, wherein the account access information is received from the first user over the Internet.

12. The computer implemented method of claim 1, wherein the account access information includes an account number.